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DARTMOUTH-AUK INTERN NEWSLETTER



Kuwait: Not Easy for Us but Always Worthwhile

During the first few weeks after our arrival, we were excited to be in a new place and were eager to explore. Determined to see the city but not yet having mastered the public bus system (which, we later discovered, was surprisingly efficient and reliable), we got our money's worth out of our shoes. We went to the beach every couple of days and down the busy streets of Salmiya almost every night, trying to take in as much of the new place as possible.

Despite our prior knowledge of the Middle East and the Gulf Region, much of what we found in Kuwait was surprising. When we first ventured into a grocery store, we were amazed that it was almost identical to an average American supermarket. We laughed at the names of American companies transliterated into Arabic and the sheer absurdity of stores such as "Armani Junior." We discovered that some businesses may close during regularly scheduled business hours and rarely return phone calls. Even large businesses did not always pick up their phones—our calls to Jazeera Airways were often put on hold for forty-five minutes. Yet when some of our well-connected friends called the same companies, they easily got in touch with someone.



A Nearby Mosque in Salmiya

The intensity of Kuwaiti driving also surprised us. We noticed that many streets had nine-inch-high medians, which the Ministry of Planning may have added to limit the illegal U-turns we often observed on median-free streets. Each time we entered a traffic circle, we gave ourselves 50-50 odds of surviving.

At the American University of Kuwait, Jordan worked in Student Affairs and Public Relations/Marketing while Akar lent his time to the Intensive English Program (IEP). Unfortunately, neither of us had the working experience we were hoping for. Akar spent much of his time in the IEP language lab, which frequently sat empty. He helped some students with writing and grammar questions, but for the most part he felt idle and underutilized. In Student Affairs, Jordan felt that his photocopying and data entry assignments were menial. He enjoyed his projects with PR/Marketing, but he was unclear on how to divide his time between the two departments. We hope that future interns are able to express their expectations and preferences in a timely fashion, so that they may make the most out of this unique program.

After a couple of weeks and about five seasons of Seinfeld on DVD, we were starting to get a little bored with our routine in Kuwait. We had seen much of what was within walking distance of our apartment and AUK. Occasionally a student would invite us out to one of the many pool halls, but that too became tiresome (partially because we're terrible at pool). We eventually discovered from the aptly-named "Kuwait Zoooom" guide book that camel races were often held in the midst of the desert. The practice of us-

ing young boys as jockeys was discontinued after human rights groups complained of the dangers posed to the children. Rather than cancel the camel races, the Al-Atraf Racing Club decided on a solution with a more Kuwaiti flavor. They researched and developed a system by which the camels could be jockeyed by boy-shaped robots controlled by men in the infield with radio remotes. Unfortunately, despite our best efforts to get in touch with the racing club, we were unable to reach anybody who knew the race times, a challenge that we leave to future interns.

We also discovered that Kuwaiti hospitality is truly top-notch. AUK faculty and staff invited us to dinners and parties, and the students often asked to spend time with us. Jordan joined an intramural football team, which he enjoyed despite being thoroughly out-matched by the talented players at AUK.

We were invited to visit the family farm of a faculty member. After a long drive down Kuwaiti Highway 80, known in America as the infamous Gulf War I-era “Highway of Death,” we turned off the road immediately after the “Iraqi Border 10 km” sign. We doubted that agriculture could be pursued in the desert, but the Abdally area in western Kuwait, known as “The Two Heavens” because of its oil and water is home to dozens of farms. Our friends’ farm boasted a large array of alfalfa plantings and other grasses for animal feed. The family’s flock of sheep was very impressive.



Akar’s dedication to vegetarianism began to weaken at a local farm



Protesters rally outside of the parliament express themselves on proposed changes to electoral districts, 20 May

In May, an AUK staff member invited us to a political protest outside of the parliament building. It was incredible, at least for us, to see an open protest tolerated in the Middle East, and we felt that democratic principles were truly taking root in Kuwait. It is clear that public assembly has a long way to go, given the quiet, unassuming nature of the protest, but the democratic voice was heard nonetheless. The road ahead is uneven, but the public voice has influence and is gaining in strength in Kuwait.

One weekend, we traveled to the Kingdom of Bahrain, which struck us as a haven for those in the Gulf region who enjoy alcohol and can afford the weekend trip. The capital city of Manama is lined with bars and nightclubs. The hotel that we stayed in had a nightclub that featured the talents of Kaktooz, a Filipino Bon Jovi cover band led by Carlo, a muscular Southeast Asian who sported multilingual tattoos and bleached blonde dreadlocks. The band certainly proved entertaining.

In our last few days in Kuwait, we spent most of our time planning the second annual AUK Awards Night. In celebration of its success, we went to a friend’s enormous beach chalet for a weekend and enjoyed a day of relaxing and jet-skiing. Watching the sun come up over the Gulf was incredible. It was at that moment that we realized that we were going to look back and remember everyone we had met and all of the experiences we had had in Kuwait over the last ten weeks with fondness and gratitude.

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